

Calls for Expansion of Rotary Wing Capabilities in TUTC Subcommittee Hearing

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47), Chairwoman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities, today held a hearing on the need for additional helicopters and tilt-wing aircraft for U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). In Iraq and Afghanistan, where rotary-wing aircraft play a vital role in counterterrorism operations and the transfer of supplies, aircraft shortages have a significant effect.

“Helicopters and other rotary-wing aircraft are instrumental to our ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Rep. Sanchez. “Special Operations Forces in particular need these aircraft to carry out their counterterrorism and counterinsurgency missions, as well as provide troops in remote locations with crucial supplies. But we have to fix ongoing helicopter shortages that are depriving our men and women in uniform of a key combat and logistical resource. Our troops, and the success of our SOF military operations, depend on it.”

At the hearing, Rep. Sanchez questioned Garry Reid, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism, and U.S. Army Colonel Vincent Reap, the Director of Rotary Lift Assessments at U.S. Special Operations Command, about the military’s current rotary-wing requirements and the impact of aircraft shortages in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A copy of the Congresswoman’s opening statement can be found below:

“Good Afternoon. I would like to welcome you all and thank you for joining us today to discuss current rotary-wing requirements for U.S. Special Operations Forces and address capability shortfalls. This hearing will also provide additional details on the expansion of rotary wing capabilities as requested by SOCOM for fiscal year 2011.

“This hearing represents a “good news, bad news” story. The good news is that the committee, the Department, and SOCOM all recognize that rotary-wing shortfalls are a critical issue for our Special Operations Forces. The bad news is that much work remains to be done, and the

proposed solutions may take years to implement.

“Currently, our Special Operations Forces operate in more than 75 countries each and every day— countering terrorism, building partnership capacity in key areas, and improving security and stability for key partner nations. Often working in remote locations with limited infrastructure and reinforcements, air assets provide a vital operational link to ensure mission success for SOF.

“Rotary-wing assets in particular are key enablers for our special operators, and critical for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. These helicopters and tilt-wing aircraft provide fire-support, surveillance, insertion/extraction, and other combat support functions. Most critically, they serve as a logistical backbone for SOF and other forces, moving critical supplies over rugged terrain to remote locations in minimal time.

“My top priority as chairwoman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities is to provide all the necessary resources to our military in order to protect our country from terrorist threats. And this includes rotary-wing assets which are high demand, low density resources.

“It is important to note that U.S. Special Operations Command cannot buy aircraft but is only authorized to pay for SOF-unique equipment for aircraft. This means that SOCOM must coordinate very closely with the Services. I look forward to discussing this process with each of the witnesses, and hearing how the Services’ larger acquisition programs align with and support SOCOM priorities.

“I hope today’s hearing will provide the necessary details on the expansion of rotary wing capabilities as requested by SOCOM for FY 2011, and a forum to discuss future year requirements and solutions needed to address rotary-wing support for Special Operations Forces.

“Today, we have two witnesses before us. First, we have Mr. Garry Reid, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism, representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense. And U.S. Army Colonel Vincent Reap, the Director of Rotary Lift Assessments at U.S. Special Operations Command, representing SOCOM.

“Once again I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to hearing your testimonies. I will now yield to the Ranking Member from Florida, Mr. Miller for his opening statement. Thank you.”